

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CARACA 13433 122126Z

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5611

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, CO, PN, VE

SUBJECT: TORRIJOS VISITS VENEZUELA TO DISCUSS CANAL WITH PEREZ

REF: CARACAS 9075

1. PANAMANIAN CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS MADE A QUICK TRIP TO VENEZUELA NOVEMBER 6 FOR A SHORT DISCUSSION WITH PRESIDENT PEREZ AT THE PRESIDENT'S LA ORCHILA ISLAND RETREAT. NO PUBLIC COMMUNIQUE FOLLOWED THE MEETING, BUT THE CARACAS PRESS SPECULATED THAT TORRIJOS INFORMED PEREZ ABOUT THE LATEST STEPS IN THE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE US AND ASKED PEREZ TO LOBBY FOR THE PANAMANIAN CAUSE DURING HIS JOURNEY OVERSEAS. FOLLOWING HIS VISIT TO VENEZUELA, TORRIJOS WENT TO CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA FOR ANOTHER BRIEF STOP. IN THIS REGARD, THE CARACAS PRESS GAVE CONSIDERABLE PLAY TO A NOV. 10 BOGOTA STORY STATING THE PRESIDENT PEREZ COULD NOT BE ABLE TO ATTEND THE PANAMANIAN-COLOMBIAN MARITIME BOUNDARY SIGNING CEREMONY

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PAGE 02 CARACA 13433 122126Z

BECAUSE HE WILL BE TRAVELLING.

2. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE THAT PEREZ WILL MAKE THE PANAMA CANAL ISSUE A CENTERPIECE OF HIS PRESENTATION TO THE UNGA NEXT WEEK AND THAT HE DID CONSULT WITH TORRIJOS ABOUT THE PANAMANIAN OPTIC OF THE NEGOTIATIONS IN PREPARATION FOR HIS TRIP. IN REGARD TO THE PANAMANIAN-COLOMBIAN MARITIME BOUNDARY CEREMONY, PEREZ HAS BEEN CAREFUL NOT TO ASSOCIATE HIMSELF TOO CLOSELY WITH THIS ISSUE SINCE IT COULD HAVE DIRECT REPERCUSSIONS ON THE LONG-STANDING GULF OF VENEZUELA OFF SHORE BOUNDARY DISPUTE WITH COLOMBIA (REFTEL). IN FACT, ON NOVEMBER 10, PEREZ TOLD THE PRESS THAT "I CANNOT TELL YOU THAT WE ARE EITHER CLOSE TO, OR FAR FROM A SOLUTION (TO THE COLOMBIAN BOUNDARY PROBLEM)".

3. A WELL INFORMED AD DEPUTY TELLS US THAT PEREZ NEVER PLANNED TO ATTEND THE PANAMANIAN-COLOMBIAN CEREMONY.
VAKY

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